

LUNDY WARDEN'S REPORT FOR 2008

This is my fourth LFS warden's report; the last three years have flown past.

In 2008 we recruited a seasonal volunteer, and Tim Baldwin joined the conservation team for the summer. He was an excellent addition to the team and greatly assisted the conservation work on Lundy over the summer months. Having an additional pair of hands was a particular help for Chris, the ranger, and highlighted the benefits of such a position. We are recruiting again for a volunteer and I hope this will become an annual position.

In 2008 a number of interpretation projects took place. The new leaflet template was finalised and Sophie Wheatley, the assistant warden, and I have since produced two new island leaflets: 'Lundy Wildlife' and 'Lundy Birds'. In 2009/10 we plan to produce more leaflets to add to this new series. We hope these will include, Lundy Codes, Seals and Walks.

The Lundy Zoning scheme 'flyer' has also been re-designed to fit in with the new Lundy style; with this and the new leaflets we are starting to see the beginnings of the style coming together.

The education program continues; Sophie spent a week on the mainland in November visiting local schools and I did the same in March; we look forward to seeing some of the children over on Lundy this summer.

Last year members saw a sneak preview of the new Natural England DVD, 'Lundy Marine Nature Reserve' at the AGM. In 2008 the production of this 10 minute DVD was finalised and this was available for viewing during the tea break.

The Lundy calendar is in its second year and sample images from the 2010 calendar were shown to members at the AGM. All the images were submitted by staff and visitors and we continue to get a fantastic response each year, with over 500 pictures submitted for the 2010 calendar challenge.

With the beach road works coming to an end we are hoping to re-develop the Beach Building; we have contracted designers for the work and will be beginning fund raising for the project shortly.

We have had a number of media visits in 2008 which generated many newspaper articles that featured the island. In June a journalist from Sport's Dive visited us for 5 days and gave us an excellent write-up about diving around Lundy. We also had visits from BBC Countryfile Magazine, BBC Westcountry, and The Times. The BBC Coast programme will be featuring Lundy in the next series.

The Marine Reserve

Three Seaflex moorings were funded by Natural England; and Anthony Glover placed the new moorings in the landing bay in June. Seaflex moorings are environmentally sensitive and do not affect the seabed through chain drag or other bottom damage. All the existing moorings in the bay are now licensed and anyone wanting to place a new,

or temporary mooring at Lundy needs to gain permission from Natural England and the Landmark Trust by applying for a licence.

Cetacean sightings were slightly down on 2007, with just 18 reported sightings of dolphins. The largest pod was seen on 18 September when up to 100 Common Dolphins were seen on the west coast.

Basking Shark numbers were disappointing and I suspect 2008 hit an all time low. In 2006 we had 14 sightings, 2007 saw just 7 sightings over 3 days and in 2008 we had just one reported sighting- on 2 August when 2 sharks were spotted off the east coast.

There were 2 reported sightings of Minke Whales; 3 individuals were seen on 24 August and another one on 28 September. Unfortunately only one of these reports actually made it into the log book, which highlights the fact that the log book does not always give us a true reflection of what is being seen in the waters around Lundy.

It is extremely important that we continue to log all our sightings, and with this in mind Sophie and I will be putting together a sightings pack which we will be distributing to all the local charter boats, dive boats and hopefully some of the fishing vessels. The aim is to ensure we are getting as many records as possible which we can then collate and report to the appropriate conservation bodies to feed into the national picture.

A partial collapse of a rockpool over winter revealed a new intertidal Scarlet & Gold Cup Coral site in Devil's Kitchen and further searches resulted in the discovery of a second new site close by. The corals are well developed so it would suggest they have been present for some time. Initial counts indicate there are at least 25 at one site and a minimum of 10 at the other. A search of Rat & Mouse Islands uncovered more Cup Coral sites with over 200 corals at one site on Rat Island and a further 250 across 11 sites on Mouse Island.

Seal Survey

Natural England has contracted Stephen Westcott to conduct an ongoing survey of the Grey Seal population on Lundy. Stephen began his survey in September and will be visiting Lundy on a monthly basis for the next year to conduct surveys which will provide population & productivity details. Initial findings are positive with over 30 pups found in his first visit alone! A pup was born on Quarry Beach in January this year, which is outside the usual pupping season, but this is now the third consecutive year we have had a pup on Quarry Beach at this time of year.

Seabirds/Terrestrial Wildlife

Sophie and I continued the seabird monitoring, with productivity surveys of Guillemots, Kittiwakes, Fulmars and Puffins.

2008 was a promising year for the Puffins; the usual suspects were back at St. Philip's Stone and we estimate 4 pairs breed successfully. There appeared to be an increase in the numbers present at this site with a lot of mid-season milling about and we suspect these were non-breeders prospecting for future burrows. We also had our first

land-based sighting of Puffins at Jenny's Cove for 10 years! There were two colony sites at Jenny's, and Puffins were seen taking fish into two different burrows at one of the sites so we can assume successful breeding, which is fantastic news. 80% of the time Puffins are faithful to their burrows so this would suggest that these were first time breeders, which is really promising for the future of Puffin numbers on Lundy! It is too early to predict if this trend will continue, but I suspect 2009 could be an exciting year for the Lundy Puffins. However, despite this apparent increase they do still remain elusive to some visitors, who unfortunately return home not having seen the birds.

The four-yearly seabird census was carried out in June, summary details are provided elsewhere.

All in all things are looking promising for the burrowing seabirds and many of the ground nesting birds appear to be doing relatively well, which all points to the success of the rat eradication. In the grand scheme of things it is still early days, and we can not yet attribute these successes to the lack of rats, but it is looking positive. Unfortunately we will never be free from the threat of a re-invasion and it is essential that we remain vigilant to ensure we stay rat free; indeed we have had a 'rat scare' every year since I have been on Lundy and 2008 was no exception.

On 17 May a visitor reported a rat sighting at Benjamin's Chair. The sighting came from a renowned wildlife photographer and was considered to be very reliable. The contingency grid was set up on 17 May with 55 bait stations & 46 monitoring stations. Daily checks were conducted until 1 July – no evidence was discovered and no further sightings were reported. As an extra precaution the Seabird Recovery Group decided that a contingency grid should be set up again in January, when natural food sources were low. This was done during the annual shut -down period and again no evidence was found, so we can confidently say that Lundy remains rat free.

The annual mammal counts took place in May. Soay Sheep are estimated to be in the region of 250, with nearly 90 lambs recorded. The feral goat estimate remains at about 40, and we had a maximum count of 83 Sika Deer; although the Sika are obviously the most elusive and therefore hardest to estimate an accurate population size. The rabbit numbers remain low with population size estimates ranging from less than 400 up to 1000.

Once again I have to congratulate Chris Flower for his work in clearing the Rhododendron. At the current rate of clearance we can confidently say that its days on Lundy are numbered. Although there is an end in sight it will still be quite a few more years until this is achieved.

There are just two stands of Rhododendron remaining and we are working on both. We have cleared an access area to the north of one remaining stand to allow cliff ropework access.

However, it's not all bad news about Rhododendron! It does have its uses, and apart from warming the tavern through the winter months, it has been put to good use in other ways and is being used to actually protect some desirable vegetation. Chris' new tree guards using cuttings have been a resounding success!

NICOLA SAUNDERS
March 2009